

Are you racially prejudiced?

By Beverly Goldsmith

Published in the *Christian Science Sentinel*. July 29, 1996, pp 3-5

A United States Marine asked me this question some years ago while I was in Vietnam singing for the troops. My indignant response to him was, "I certainly am not!" He replied that everyone was prejudiced.

Affronted by his point of view, I strenuously denied that I was biased. When I was a child, my mother had sent me to neighbourhood Sunday Schools where I was taught the Golden Rule and to love my neighbour as myself. Later, when our family was introduced to Christian Science, we attended the church and Sunday School and started reading the Bible and *Science and Health* each day.

From these two books we learned that each of us is actually the precious child of God, always loved and cherished by Him. This thought was comforting to me. I particularly liked the way Christ Jesus began the Lord's Prayer with the words "our Father". In such a simple, loving way, this prayer encompasses each and every individual. We all are the offspring of the one Father-Mother, God.

This precious knowledge made me feel close to God and to other people as well. In the workplace it helped me not to judge others by their appearance or speech, but to look for the good they expressed. Equipped with this understanding, I felt confident that I held no preconceived opinions of people based on race or gender. Imagine my surprise when years later this view of myself was unexpectedly challenged.

During alterations to our home several wall tiles cracked and I hurried out to buy replacements. At a local tile store, a woman of another race approached me. Thinking she was office staff, I turned to the man talking with her, expecting that he would assist me. When it became clear that she was going to attend to my request, I suddenly felt displeased at the prospect. How could a woman struggling to speak my language possibly know what to do?

As she left the room I decided that I should have gone to another store. Becoming aware of the direction of these unpleasant thoughts, I took a moment to pray. Standing there quietly, I recalled an experience that one of Christ Jesus' disciples had with a man of another nationality (see Acts 10: 1-48).

The Bible says that the man asked the disciple Peter to come and meet with him. Peter was concerned about doing this because it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company with or visit someone of another religion or background. Yet, in obedience to God's direction, Peter went to the man's house, where he found many people waiting to hear him speak. When the man told Peter why he had sent for him, Peter realized that God had brought them together. He knew then that he had been wrong to think of someone as inferior because of his or her nationality. He said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Peter's words reminded me of my need to respect this woman and to stop making judgments about her gender and race. This statement in *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy also clarified the situation for me: "It should be thoroughly understood that all men have one Mind, one God and Father, one Life, Truth, and Love" (p.467). This powerful declaration humbled me. It made me realize not only that the woman and I were equal in God's sight but that God was actually our common Parent.

Humanly, we came from different countries, but our spiritual origin was the same. We were both children of God. It was not right for me to continue thinking of her, or anyone else for that matter, as inferior. Nor was it correct to assume that someone was incapable of doing certain work because of his or her gender. I had learned this lesson from the Bible, which says, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen 1:27).

This verse makes clear the equality that exists between all of God's ideas. God created man, male and female, in His own likeness. Each individual intelligently reflects the fatherhood and motherhood of God in thought and action. Yet as I stood in the store pondering this verse anew, I realized that it was more than a simple statement about equal rights. It was a just acknowledgment of everyone's divine inheritance as a child of God.

We all have the God-given ability to express intelligence. This has nothing to do with gender, race, or what country we come from. Every child of God expresses divine qualities. This has been proved to me in my own life.